

Statement of
U.S. Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA)
Ranking Democrat, House Subcommittee on
Telecommunications and the Internet
“Rally to Save Public Broadcasting”
June 21, 2005

Last week, the House Appropriations Committee approved drastic cuts in programs for public broadcasting. The Committee Republicans zeroed-out funding for the “Ready to Learn” program, a program which supports children’s television and has helped prepare 8 million pre-school kids for success in school. The Republicans have also cut next year’s overall Corporation for Public Broadcasting budget by 25% -- in addition to a series of severe cuts in other public broadcasting programs which officials estimate as an total slashing of financial help to the system reaching 45 percent.

These are devastating cuts to a system that is highly valued by parents across America. We have in front of us the signatures of 1 million Americans who are as concerned as we are about these cuts.

And here’s what these petitions say – “Congress must save NPR, PBS and local public stations. We trust them for in-depth news and educational children's programming. It's money well spent.”

Moreover, Clifford the Big Red Dog, Maya & Miguel, and Leona the Lion are here! (And they are here with various other friends including some of their biggest – if not the tallest – supporters to rally to save quality educational children’s television shows!!!)

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting helps local public broadcasters provide an educational, informational, non-violent, pro-family alternative to what's often on the commercial channels.

Commercial broadcasting simply does not provide educational programming for children for most of the day. In fact, the big commercial networks -- ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC -- tell us that they can't do more educational programming for children because it's not profitable.

PBS stations, in contrast, offer up to 12 hours of educational programming for kids per DAY -- not per week, but per DAY.

For instance, what is available on commercial television today for the kids? Let me give you the rundown:

In the morning, there’s
Jerry Springer,
Montel Williams,

Maury,
Judge Hatchett,
and Divorce Court.

Then, just after noontime, comes The Insider,
A Current Affair, and
The Young and the Restless.

In the mid-afternoon, there's Days of Our Lives,
General Hospital,
Judge Joe Brown,
Judge Judy,
Fear Factor,
the Bold and the Beautiful,
Dr. Phil,
Ambush Makeover,
and a show called "Passions."

In other words, for kids watching free over-the-air television over the public's
airways, the content caters not to kids, but largely to adult audiences.

Yet over on public broadcasting there's a line-up of content that is a parent or a
teacher's best friend.....for instance, on WGBH in Boston, or WETA here in Washington
-- and stations all across the country -- from 6am until 6pm, there are 12 hours of high
quality kids shows. Let me just read the lineup.....

At 6am, there's WGBH's award-winning Between the Lions,
then Zoom,
then Maya & Miguel,
Arthur,
Berenstein Bears,
Clifford the Big Red Dog,
Dragon Tales,
George Shrinks,
Barney and Friends,
Sesame Street,
and then Mister Rogers Neighborhood -- which brings us to noontime.

And then rather than soap operas in the afternoon, on public broadcasting the kids get to
see Reading Rainbow, Clifford the Big Red Dog,
Arthur,
Postcards from Buster,
Dragon Tales,
Maya & Miguel,
Cyberchase,

and on and on with other quality educational shows all the way until we hit the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer at 6pm.

There is simply no comparison. Yet the Republicans are proposing to cut “Ready to Learn,” which helps to support many of these children’s shows, and which is designed to build school readiness and literacy skills for kids aged 2 to 8 years old.

The Republicans are also drastically cutting money out of the CPB budget which supports television and radio stations and which will further put these children’s programs in jeopardy.

Well, we’re here to rally today against such misguided cuts!

–As one loyal viewer wrote to us recently:

'Sesame Street teaches good values, strong learning skills, and most importantly, instills children with a love of learning and an inquisitiveness that proves valuable their whole lives long. NPR does the same for adults! Please save them both!'

Not everyone subscribes to cable. For instance, the Government Accountability Office has estimated that some 19 percent of American homes do not subscribe to cable or satellite television. And some 10 million of these homes are those with household income of less than \$30,000 a year. Moreover, even for those who can afford to subscribe to cable, we must remember that not all cable shows for kids are educational or informationally-nutritious. In an environment without a local public broadcaster who airs these shows, what do we give these kids to watch? Where will parents turn the dial?

The fact is that television is one of the most important influences on our children's lives. We might wish it were different, but that won't bring us back to the 1950's when children watched relatively little TV. Today they watch 4 to 7 hours every day.

Public broadcasting remains an electronic oasis for learning in what has been called the vast wasteland of commercial television.

For the cost of less than \$2 per year per person what parents and kids get from public TV is an incredible bargain. The question is not, "Can we afford it?," but rather, "Can we afford to lose it?"

Moveon.org has been facilitating communication from over 1 million Americans across the country, who have signed this petition, in front of us, asking that their voices be heard in Congress to restore funding for public broadcasting. Thank you *Moveon.org* for your wonderful efforts.

And now let me introduce some of our special friends and guests and heroes of public broadcasting with us today.....

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